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Smoked Skipper

By W. W. JACOBS,
 Author of "Many Cargoes" and "The Skipper's
 Woe."

[Copyright, 1900, by W. W. Jacobs.]

"Wapping Old Stairs," said the rough
 individual, shouldering the brand new
 sea chest and starting off at a trot with
 it; "Yus, I know the place, captin."

"Fust v'y'ge, sir?"

"Aye, aye, my hearty," replied the
 owner of the chest, a small, ill looking
 lad of 14. "Not so fast with those
 timbers of yours. D'ye hear?"

"All right, sir," said the man and,
 slackening his pace, twisted his head
 round to take stock of his companion.

"This ain't your fust v'y'ge, captin,"
 he said admiringly. "Don't tell me. I
 could twig that directly I see you. Ho,
 what's the use o' trying to aim it over
 a poor 'ard working man like that?"

"I don't think there's much about the
 sea I don't know," said the boy in a
 satisfied voice. "Starboard, starboard
 your hullum a bit."

The man obeyed promptly. They
 went the remainder of the distance in
 this fashion, to the great inconvenience
 of people coming from the other di-
 rection.

"And a cheap 'arf crown's worth, too,
 captin," said the man as he thought-
 fully put the chest down at the head
 of the stairs and sat on it pending pay-
 ment.

"I want to go off to the Susan Jane,"
 said the boy, turning to a waterman
 who was sitting in his boat, holding on
 to the side of the steps with his hand.

"All right," said the man. "Give us
 a hold o' your box."

"Put it aboard," said the boy to the
 other man.

"A' right, captin," said the man, with
 a cheerful smile; "but I'll have my 'arf
 crown fust if you don't mind."

"But you said sixpence at the sta-
 tion," said the boy.

"Two an' sixpence, captin," said the
 man, still smiling; "but I'm a bit 'usky,
 an' p'raps you didn't 'ear the two. 'Arf
 a crown's the reglar price. We ain't
 allowed to do it under."

"Well, I won't tell anybody," said the
 boy.

"Give the man 'is 'arf crown," said
 the waterman, with sudden heat.

"That's 'is price, an' my fare's 18
 pence."

"All right," said the boy readily,
 "cheap too. I didn't know the price,
 that's all. But I can't pay either of you
 till I get aboard. I've only got sixpence.
 I'll tell the captain to give you the
 rest."

"Tell 'oo?" demanded the light porter
 with some violence.

"The captain," said the boy.

"Look 'ere, you give me that 'arf
 crown," said the other, "else I'll chuck
 your box overboard an' you after it."

"Wait a minute then," said the boy,
 darting away up the narrow alley
 which led to the stairs. "I'll go and get
 change."

"E's goin to change 'arf a suveren or
 p'raps a suveren," said the waterman.
 "You'd better make it five bob, matey."

"Ah, an' you make yours more," said
 the light porter cordially. "Well, I'm—
 well, of all the—"

"Get off that box," said the big po-
 leman who had come back with the
 boy. "Take your sixpence and go. If I
 catch you down this way again!"

He finished the sentence by taking
 the fellow by the scruff of the neck and
 giving him a violent push as he passed
 him.

"Waterman's fare is threepence," he
 said to the boy as the man in the boat
 with an utterly expressionless face
 took the chest from him. "I'll stay here
 till he has put you aboard."

The boy took his seat, and the water-
 man, breathing hard, pulled out toward
 the vessels in the tier. He looked at the

replied the skipper. "He's got a fancy
 for being a pirate, so just to oblige his
 father I told him we was a pirate. He
 wouldn't have come if I hadn't."

"I'll pirate him," said the mate, rub-
 bing his hands.

"He's a dreadful 'andful by all ac-
 counts," continued the other. "Got his
 'ed stuffed full o' these 'ere penny
 dreadfuls till they've turned his brain
 almost. He started by being an Indian
 and goin off on 'is own with two other
 kids. When 'e wanted to turn cannibal,
 the other two objected and gave
 'im in charge. After that he did a bit o'
 burgling, and it cost 'is old man no end
 o' money to hush it up."

"Well, what did you want him for?"
 grumbled the mate.

"I'm goin to knock the nonsense out
 of him," said the skipper softly as the
 boat grazed the side. "Just step for'ard
 and let the hands know what's expect-
 ed o' 'em. When we get to sea, it
 won't matter."

The mate moved off grumbling as the
 small fare stood on the thwarts and
 scrambled up over the side. The wa-
 terman passed up the chest and, drop-
 ping the coppers into his pocket, push-
 ed off again without a word.

"Well, you've got here all right,
 Ralph," said the skipper. "What do
 you think of her?"

"She's a rakish looking craft," said
 the boy, looking round the dingy old
 tub with much satisfaction, "but
 where's your arms?"

"Hush!" said the skipper and laid his
 finger on his nose.

"Oh, all right," said the youth testily,
 "but you might tell me."

"You shall know all in good time,"
 said the skipper patiently, turning to
 the crew, who came shuffling up, mask-
 ing broad grins with dirty palms.

"Here's a new shipmate for you, my
 lads. He's small, but he's the right
 stuff."

The newcomer drew himself up and
 regarded the crew with some disap-
 satisfaction. For desperadoes they looked
 far too good tempered and prone to
 levity.

"What's the matter with you, Jem
 Smithers?" inquired the skipper, scow-
 ling at a huge fair haired man who was
 laughing discordantly.

"I was thinkin o' the last party I kill-
 ed, sir," said Jem with sudden gravity.
 "I allers laugh when I think 'ow he
 squealed."

"You laugh too much," said the other
 sternly as he laid a hand on Ralph's
 shoulder. "Take a lesson from this fine
 feller. He doesn't laugh. He acts.
 Take 'im down below an' show him 'is
 bunk."

"Will you please to follow me, sir?"
 said Smithers, leading the way below.

"I dessey you'll find it a bit stuffy, but
 that's owing to Bill Dobbs. A reg'lar
 old sea dog is Bill, always sleeps in 'is
 clothes and never washes."

"I don't think the worse of him for
 that," said Ralph, regarding the fer-
 menting Dobbs kindly.

"You'd best keep a civil tongue in
 your 'ed, my lad," said Dobbs shortly.

"Never mind 'im," said Smithers
 cheerfully. "Nobody takes any notice
 o' old Dobbs. You can 'it 'im if you
 like. I won't let him hurt you."

"I don't want to start by quarreling,"
 said Ralph seriously.

"You're afraid," said Jem tauntingly.
 "You'll never make one of us. 'It 'im.
 I won't let 'im 'urt you."

Thus aroused, the boy, first directing
 Dobbs' attention to his stomach by a
 curious duck of his head, much admir-
 ed as a feat in his neighborhood,
 struck him in the face. The next mo-
 ment the forecastle was in an uproar
 and Ralph prostrate on Dobbs' knees
 frantically reminding Jem of his prom-
 ise.

"All right, I won't let 'im 'urt you,"
 said Jem consolingly.

"But he is hurting me," yelled the
 boy. "He is hurting me now."

"Well, wait till I get 'im ashore," said
 Jem. "His old woman won't know him
 when I've done with him."

The boy's reply to this was a torrent
 of shrill abuse, principally directed to
 Jem's facial shortcomings.

"Now, don't get rude," said the sea-
 man, grinning.

"Squint eyes!" cried Ralph fiercely.
 "When you've done with that 'ere
 young gentleman, Dobbs," said Jem
 with exquisite politeness, "I should
 like to 'ave 'im for a little bit to teach
 'im manners."

"E don't want to go," said Dobbs,
 grinning, as Ralph clung to him. "He
 knows who's kind to him."

"Wait till I get a chance at you,"
 sobbed Ralph as Jem took him away
 from Dobbs.

"Lord lumme," said Jem, regarding
 him in astonishment. "Why, he's ac-
 toally cryin. I've seen a good many
 pirates in my time, Bill, but this is a
 new sort."

"Leave the boy alone," said the cook,
 a fat, good natured man. "Here, come
 ere, old man. They don't mean no
 'arm."

Glad to escape, Ralph made his way
 over to the cook, grinding his teeth
 with shame as the cook took him be-
 tween his knees and mopped his eyes
 with something which he called a
 handkerchief.

"You'll be all right," he said kindly.
 "You'll be as good a pirate as any of us
 before you're finished."

"Wait till the first engagement, that's
 all," sobbed the boy. "If somebody
 don't get shot in the back, it won't be
 my fault."

The two seamen looked at each other.
 "That's wot hurt 'im and, then," said
 Dobbs slowly. "I thought it was a
 jackknife."

He reached over and unceremonious-
 ly grabbing the boy by the collar pulled
 him toward him and drew a small,
 cheap revolver from his pocket. "Look
 at that, Jem!"

"Take your fingers off the blasted

trigger, and then I will," said the other
 somewhat sourly.

"I'll pitch it overboard," said Dobbs.

"Don't be a fool, Bill," said Smithers,
 pocketing it. "That's worth a few pints
 o' anybody's money. Stand out o' the
 way, Bill. The pirit king wants to go
 on deck."

Bill stood aside as the boy went to
 the ladder and allowing him to get up
 four or five steps did the rest for him
 with his shoulder. The boy reached the
 deck on all fours and, regaining a
 more dignified position as soon as pos-
 sible, went and leaned over the side,
 regarding with lofty contempt the busy
 drudges on wharf and river.

They sailed at midnight and brought
 up in the early dawn in Longreach,
 where a lighter loaded with barrels
 came alongside, and the boy smelled
 romance and mystery when he learned
 that they contained powder. They